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#38
MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
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DOCTOR
STRANGE®
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS
PANIC IN THE PARK!

Once he was a man like most *others*— a *worldly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like no other!

STAN LEE PRESENTS: DR. STRANGE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

CHRIS CLAREMONT *VISION* | GENE COLAN, *SHAPE* DAN GREEN, *FORM* | TOM ORZECHOWSKI, *sound* BOB SHAREN, *hue* | JO DUFFY *and* ALLEN MILGROM *VIEW* | JIM SHOOTER *JUDGMENT*

EYE of the BEHOLDER!

BEYOND THE WALLS OF THE SANCTUM SANCTORUM, OUT ON BLEEKER STREET IN GREENWICH VILLAGE, A BLUEGRASS BAND IS PLAYING, AS THE INDIAN SUMMER NIGHT SMILES DOWN ON A CITY TOO FULL OF LIFE AND JOY TO SLEEP.

WITHIN THOSE WALLS, HOWEVER, ALL IS SILENCE.

THE MAGE SITS MOTIONLESS WITHIN A CIRCLE OF POWER, AS HE HAS SAT FOR THE PAST THREE DAYS, DEEP IN TRANCE. HIS NAME IS **STEPHEN STRANGE**; HIS TITLE, MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS.

SINCE ASSUMING HIS SORCERER'S MANTLE -- AND THE ROLE OF EARTH'S DEFENDER AGAINST THE DARKSOME MYSTIC FORCES WHICH THREATEN IT -- HE HAS FACED COUNTLESS FOES, AND ALWAYS TRIUMPHED.

THAT HAS CHANGED.

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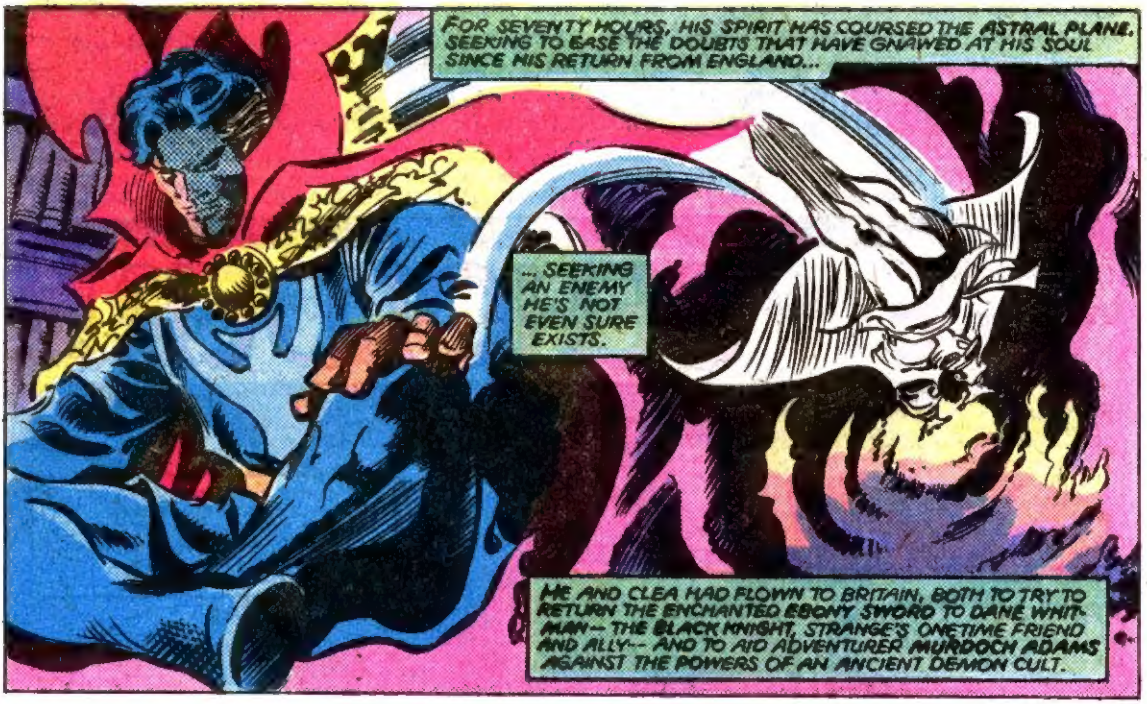
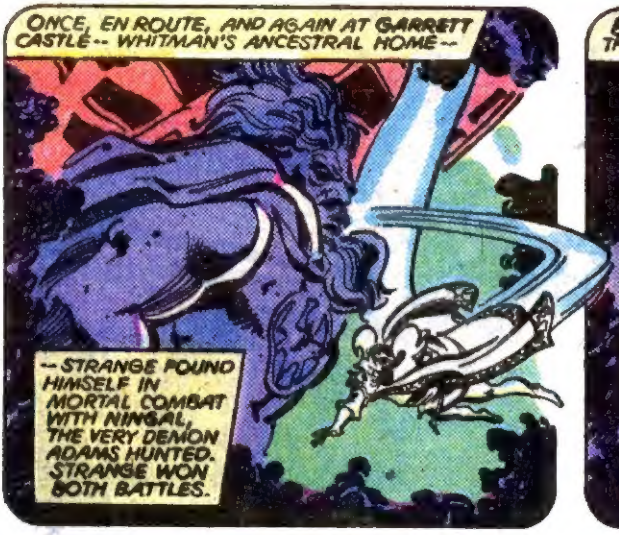
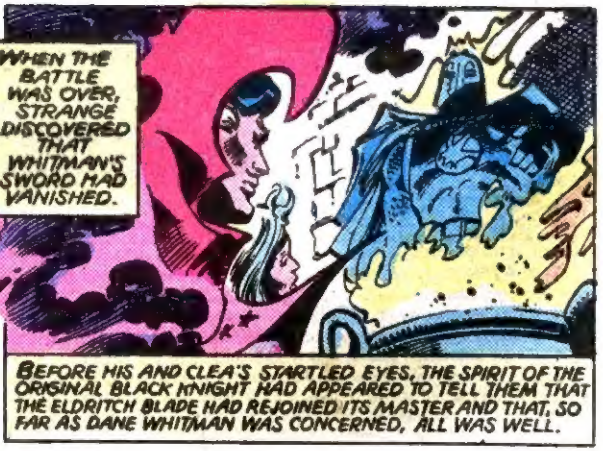
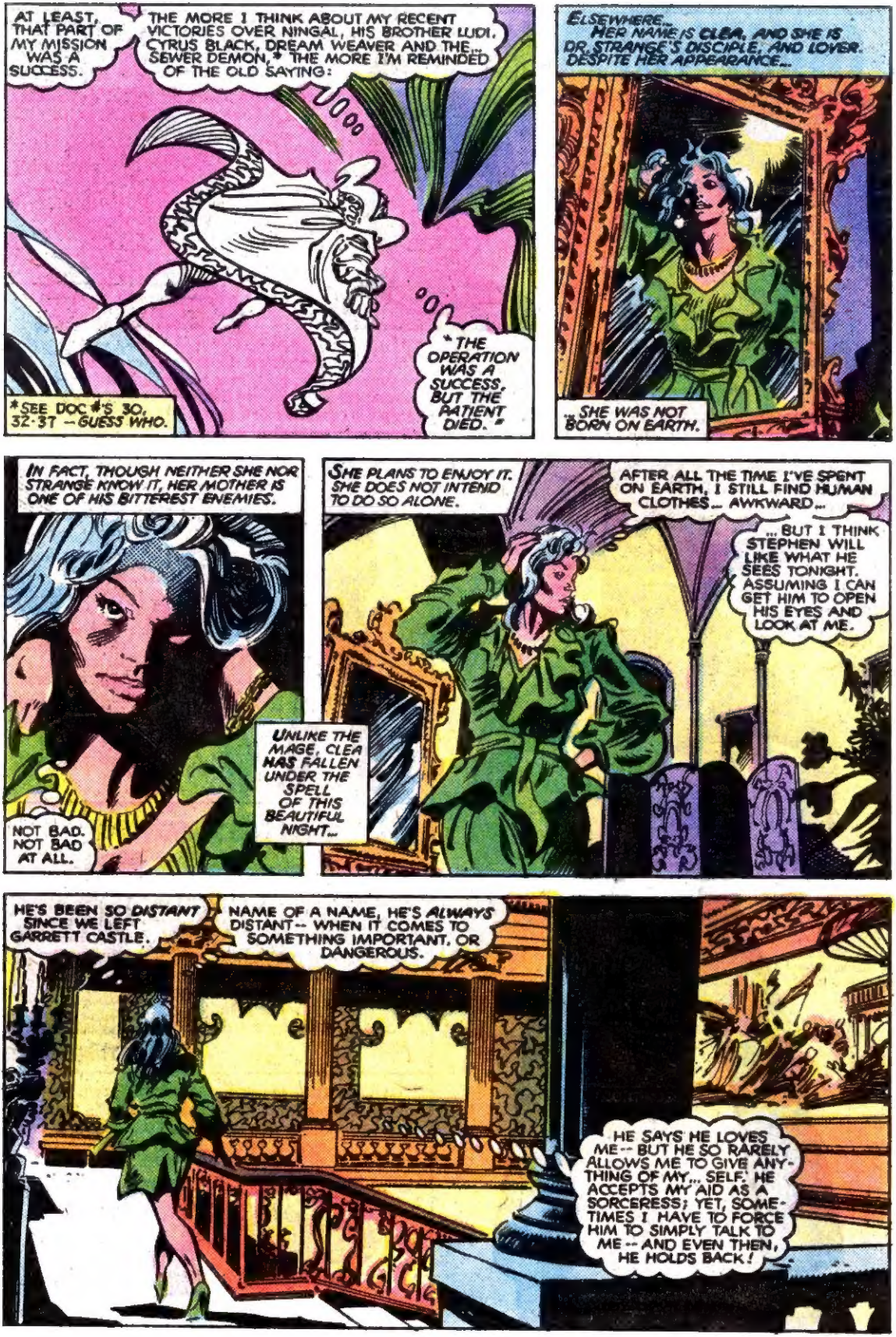

FOR SEVENTY HOURS, HIS SPIRIT HAS COURSED THE ASTRAL PLANE, SEEKING TO EASE THE DOUBTS THAT HAVE GNAWED AT HIS SOUL SINCE HIS RETURN FROM ENGLAND...
...SEEKING AN ENEMY HE'S NOT EVEN SURE EXISTS.
HE AND CLEA HAD FLOWN TO BRITAIN, BOTH TO TRY TO RETURN THE ENCHANTED EBONY SWORD TO DANE WHITMAN -- THE BLACK KNIGHT, STRANGE'S ONETIME FRIEND AND ALLY -- AND TO AID ADVENTURER MURDOCH ADAMS AGAINST THE POWERS OF AN ANCIENT DEMON CULT.


ONCE, EN ROUTE, AND AGAIN AT GARRETT CASTLE -- WHITMAN'S ANCESTRAL HOME --
-- STRANGE FOUND HIMSELF IN MORTAL COMBAT WITH NINGAL, THE VERY DEMON ADAMS HUNTED. STRANGE WON BOTH BATTLES.

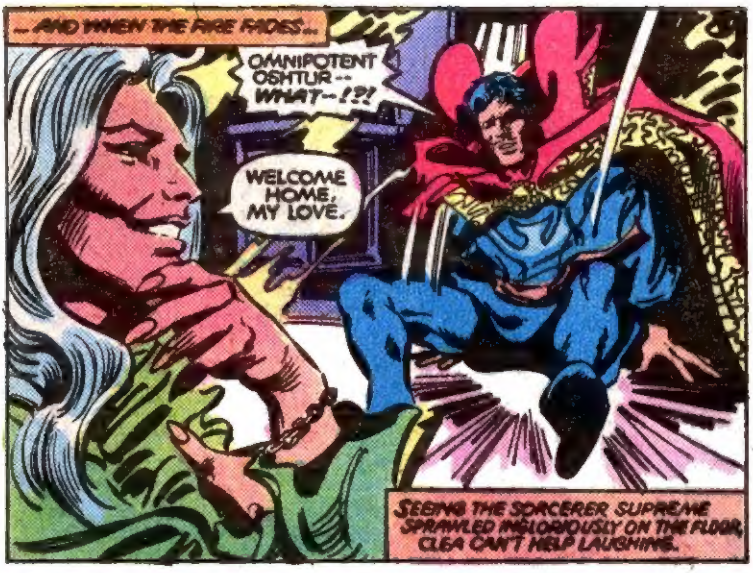
BUT AS HE SOUGHT TO DIVINE THE IDENTITY OF THE BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR NINGAL'S ATTACK...
...STRANGE'S ASTRAL FORM WAS HURLED, AGAINST HIS WILL, BACK INTO HIS PHYSICAL BODY. *
*AS WE ALL SAW LAST ISSUE -- JO

I WAS BRACED, READY FOR AN ATTACK.
YET, I WAS DISMISSED WITH CONTEMPTUOUS EASE. WHO -- OR WHAT -- EVER I FACE MUST POSSESS INCALCULABLE POWER. BUT IF SO, WHY DOESN'T THIS UNKNOWN FOE SHOW HIMSELF?!

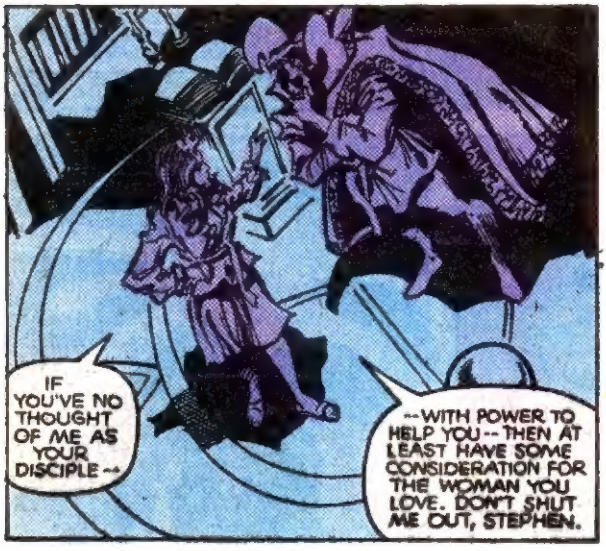

WHEN THE BATTLE WAS OVER, STRANGE DISCOVERED THAT WHITMAN'S SWORD HAD VANISHED.
BEFORE HIS AND CLEA'S STARTLED EYES, THE SPIRIT OF THE ORIGINAL BLACK KNIGHT HAD APPEARED TO TELL THEM THAT THE ELDRITCH BLADE HAD REJOINED ITS MASTER AND THAT, SO FAR AS DANE WHITMAN WAS CONCERNED, ALL WAS WELL.


AT LEAST, THAT PART OF MY MISSION WAS A SUCCESS.
THE MORE I THINK ABOUT MY RECENT VICTORIES OVER NINGAL, HIS BROTHER LUDI, CYRUS BLACK, DREAM WEAVER AND THE... SEWER DEMON,* THE MORE I'M REMINDED OF THE OLD SAYING:
"THE OPERATION WAS A SUCCESS, BUT THE PATIENT DIED."
*SEE DOC #'S 30, 32-37 -- GUESS WHO.
ELSEWHERE... HER NAME IS CLEA, AND SHE IS DR. STRANGE'S DISCIPLE, AND LOVER. DESPITE HER APPEARANCE...
...SHE WAS NOT BORN ON EARTH.
IN FACT, THOUGH NEITHER SHE NOR STRANGE KNOW IT, HER MOTHER IS ONE OF HIS BITTEREST ENEMIES.
NOT BAD. NOT BAD AT ALL.
UNLIKE THE MAGE, CLEA HAS FALLEN UNDER THE SPELL OF THIS BEAUTIFUL NIGHT...
SHE PLANS TO ENJOY IT. SHE DOES NOT INTEND TO DO SO ALONE.
AFTER ALL THE TIME I'VE SPENT ON EARTH, I STILL FIND HUMAN CLOTHES... AWKWARD...
...BUT I THINK STEPHEN WILL LIKE WHAT HE SEES TONIGHT. ASSUMING I CAN GET HIM TO OPEN HIS EYES AND LOOK AT ME.
HE'S BEEN SO DISTANT SINCE WE LEFT GARRETT CASTLE.
NAME OF A NAME, HE'S ALWAYS DISTANT -- WHEN IT COMES TO SOMETHING IMPORTANT, OR DANGEROUS.
HE SAYS HE LOVES ME -- BUT HE SO RARELY ALLOWS ME TO GIVE ANY-THING OF MY... SELF. HE ACCEPTS MY AID AS A SORCERESS; YET, SOME-TIMES I HAVE TO FORCE HIM TO SIMPLY TALK TO ME -- AND EVEN THEN, HE HOLDS BACK!

HIS SANCTUM IS SEALED BY LOCK AND ENCHANT-MENT.
BEFORE I DO ANYTHING, I MUST CLEAR MY MIND.
THERE, THAT'S BETTER.
BY THE DEMONS THAT SWOOP O'ER THE SHADOWY SHORES-- LET A MYSTICAL BOLT PIERCE THESE BARRIER DOORS!
POOF
LIGHT FLASHES FROM CLEA'S OUTSTRETCHED HAND, FORMING A CORRUSCATING NIMBUS AROUND THE OLD, OAKEN DOORS. AT HER TOUCH, THEY SWING SOUNDLESSLY OPEN.
FROM HERE ON, I HAVE TO BE VERY CAREFUL.
MY MAGICKS SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO BREACH STEPHEN'S PROTECTIVE CIRCLE AND DRAW HIS SPIRIT BACK TO EARTH, BUT IT WILL TAKE VIRTUALLY ALL MY POWER...
SHE CONCENTRATES...
...AND WHILE ONE PART OF HER MIND PREPARES HER SPELL, AN OTHER PART SEARCHES FOR ANY MALEFICENT PRESENCES OR VIBRATIONS. IF THERE IS EVEN THE SLIGHTEST HINT OF DANGER, SHE WON'T CAST HER SPELL.
BUT SHE FINDS NOTHING. ALL IS PEACEFUL.
IN THE NAME OF THE ETERNAL VISHANTI!
LET THE TRANCE BE DONE, LET THE VEIL BE TORN, WITH NEW LIFE BEGUN-- BE YOU NOW-- REBORN!
THE PENTAGRAM FLARES STAR-BRIGHT WITH SILVER FIRE...

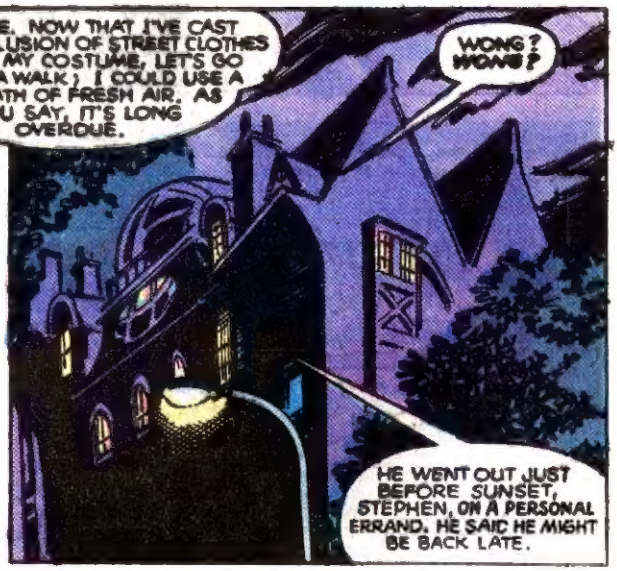

...AND WHEN THE FIRE FADES...
OMNIPOTENT OSHTUR -- WHAT--!?!
WELCOME HOME, MY LOVE.
SEEING THE SORCERER SUPREME SPRAWLED INGLORIOUSLY ON THE FLOOR, CLEA CAN'T HELP LAUGHING.

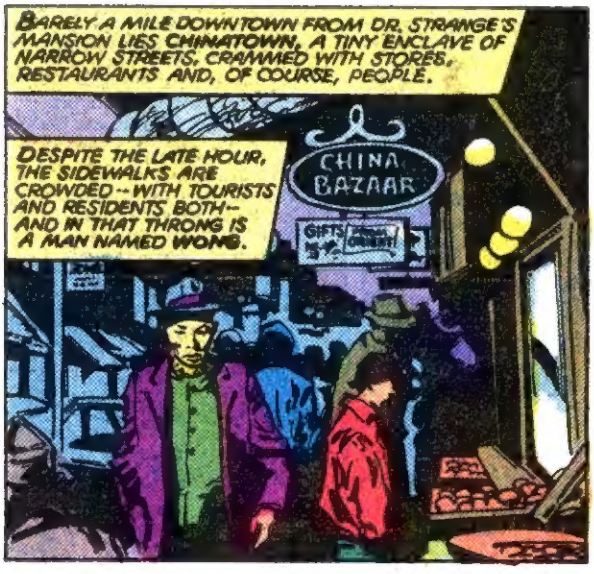
CLEA! WHY DID YOU DISRUPT MY MEDITATION LIKE THAT?!
I DID IT BECAUSE I LOVE YOU, STEPHEN STRANGE. I WAS CONCERNED ABOUT YOU.


IF YOU'VE NO THOUGHT OF ME AS YOUR DISCIPLE--
--WITH POWER TO HELP YOU -- THEN AT LEAST HAVE SOME CONSIDERATION FOR THE WOMAN YOU LOVE. DON'T SHUT ME OUT, STEPHEN.

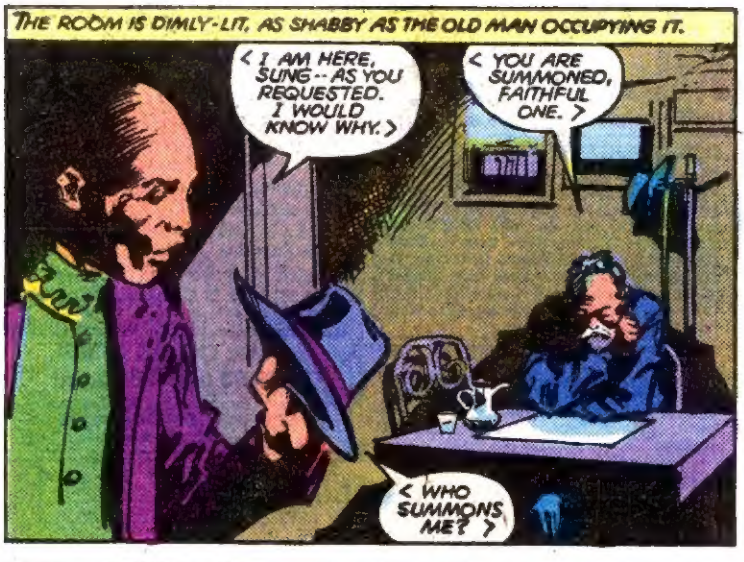
BY THE VISHANTI, I'VE NEVER SEEN CLEA SO UPSET.
AND, I FEAR, WITH GOOD REASON.
YOU'RE... RIGHT.

SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ME IN ENGLAND -- I'M NOT SURE WHAT.
I ONLY KNOW THAT, SINCE THEN, I'VE BEGUN TO DOUBT MY POWER, MY VOCATION, MY... SELF.


COME. NOW THAT I'VE CAST AN ILLUSION OF STREET CLOTHES OVER MY COSTUME, LET'S GO FOR A WALK; I COULD USE A BREATH OF FRESH AIR. AS YOU SAY, IT'S LONG OVERDUE.
WONG? WONG?
HE WENT OUT JUST BEFORE SUNSET, STEPHEN, ON A PERSONAL ERRAND. HE SAID HE MIGHT BE BACK LATE.


BARELY A MILE DOWNTOWN FROM DR. STRANGE'S MANSION LIES CHINATOWN, A TINY ENCLAVE OF NARROW STREETS, CRAMMED WITH STORES, RESTAURANTS AND, OF COURSE, PEOPLE.
DESPITE THE LATE HOUR, THE SIDEWALKS ARE CROWDED -- WITH TOURISTS AND RESIDENTS BOTH -- AND IN THAT THRONG IS A MAN NAMED WONG.
CHINA BAZAAR
GIFTS

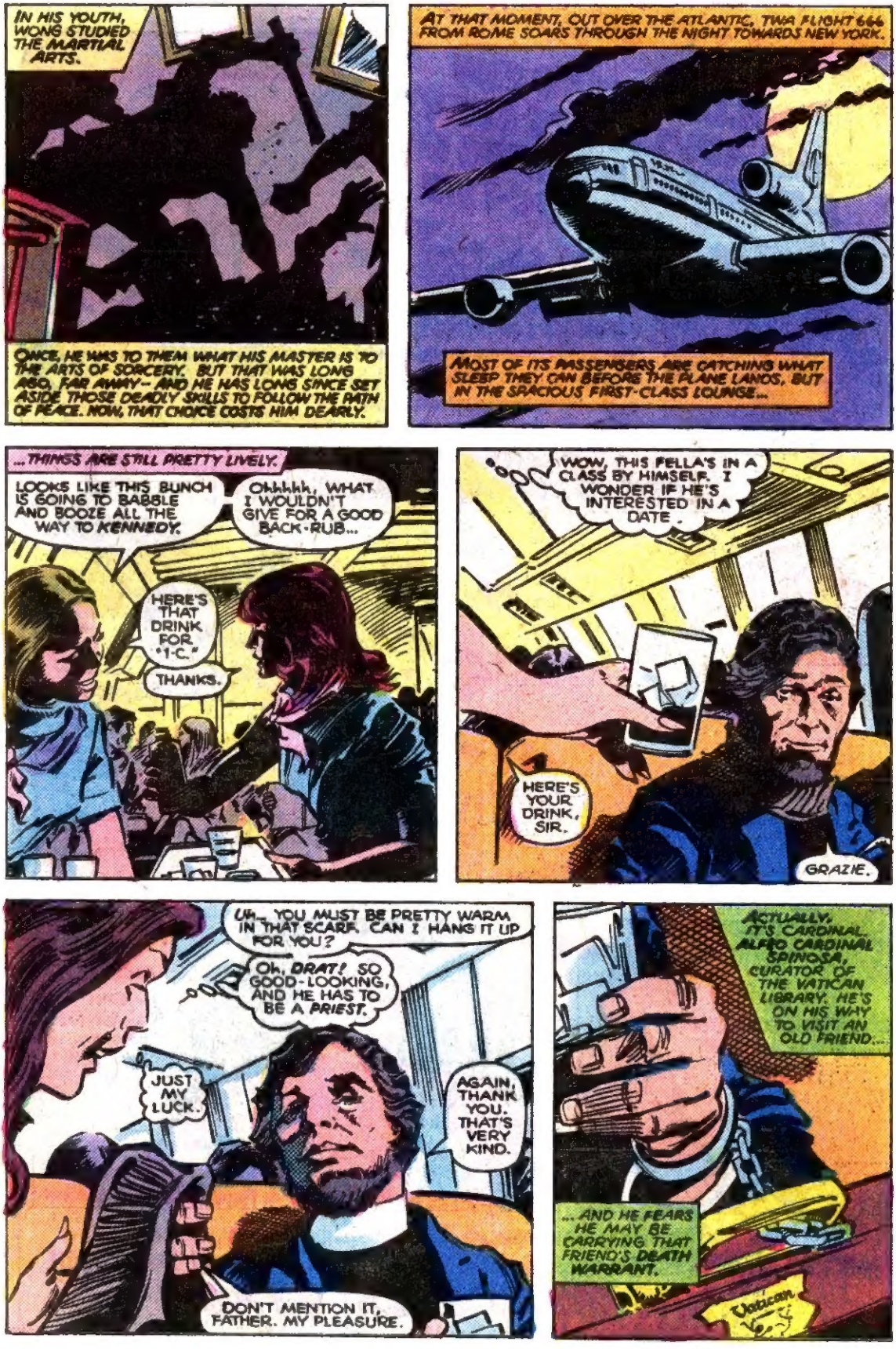
THOUGH IT IS A COMMON NAME, HE IS AN UNCOMMON MAN. HE HAS SERVED DR. STRANGE SINCE THE MAGE'S FIRST DAYS AS A DISCIPLE OF THE ANCIENT ONE, AND IN THAT SERVICE HE HAS FACED DEATH AND WORSE THAN DEATH.
IN ALL THAT TIME, HE HAS NEVER BETRAYED HIS MASTER.


THE ROOM IS DIMLY-LIT, AS SHABBY AS THE OLD MAN OCCUPYING IT.
< I AM HERE, SUNG -- AS YOU REQUESTED. I WOULD KNOW WHY. >
< YOU ARE SUMMONED, FAITHFUL ONE. >
< WHO SUMMONS ME? >

< ONE TO WHOM YOU OWE YOUR LIFE, AND TO WHOM YOU SWORE AN OATH OF LOYALTY. >
< I... SEE. I MUST TELL MY MASTER. >
< NO! >

< ABOVE ALL, THE SORCERER MUST NOT KNOW! >
< HE IS MY FRIEND. >
< NOT ANYMORE. >

< SUDDENLY, OLD FRIEND, I NO LONGER TRUST YOU -- OR BELIEVE YOU. YOU SAY I AM SUMMONED. I SAY YOU LIE. I WILL NOT STAY.
< I'M AFRAID YOU HAVE NO CHOICE. >
< HAN! DENG! TAKE HIM! >

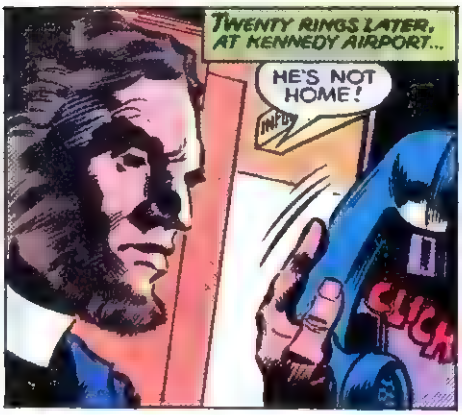

IN HIS YOUTH, WONG STUDIED THE MARTIAL ARTS.
ONCE, HE WAS TO THEM WHAT HIS MASTER IS TO THE ARTS OF SORCERY. BUT THAT WAS LONG AGO, FAR AWAY -- AND HE HAS LONG SINCE SET ASIDE THOSE DEADLY SKILLS TO FOLLOW THE PATH OF PEACE. NOW, THAT CHOICE COSTS HIM DEARLY.
AT THAT MOMENT, OUT OVER THE ATLANTIC, TWA FLIGHT 666 FROM ROME SOARS THROUGH THE NIGHT TOWARDS NEW YORK.
MOST OF ITS PASSENGERS ARE CATCHING WHAT SLEEP THEY CAN BEFORE THE PLANE LANDS, BUT IN THE SPACIOUS FIRST-CLASS LOUNGE...
...THINGS ARE STILL PRETTY LIVELY.
LOOKS LIKE THIS BUNCH IS GOING TO BABBLE AND BOOZE ALL THE WAY TO KENNEDY.
Ohhhhh, WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE FOR A GOOD BACK-RUB...
HERE'S THAT DRINK FOR "1-C."
THANKS.
WOW, THIS FELLA'S IN A CLASS BY HIMSELF. I WONDER IF HE'S INTERESTED IN A DATE.
HERE'S YOUR DRINK, SIR.
GRAZIE.
Uh- YOU MUST BE PRETTY WARM IN THAT SCARF. CAN I HANG IT UP FOR YOU?
Oh, DRAT! SO GOOD-LOOKING, AND HE HAS TO BE A PRIEST.
JUST MY LUCK.
AGAIN, THANK YOU. THAT'S VERY KIND.
DON'T MENTION IT, FATHER. MY PLEASURE.
ACTUALLY, IT'S CARDINAL ALFIO CARDINAL SPINOSA, CURATOR OF THE VATICAN LIBRARY. HE'S ON HIS WAY TO VISIT AN OLD FRIEND...
...AND HE FEARS HE MAY BE CARRYING THAT FRIEND'S DEATH WARRANT.
Vatican

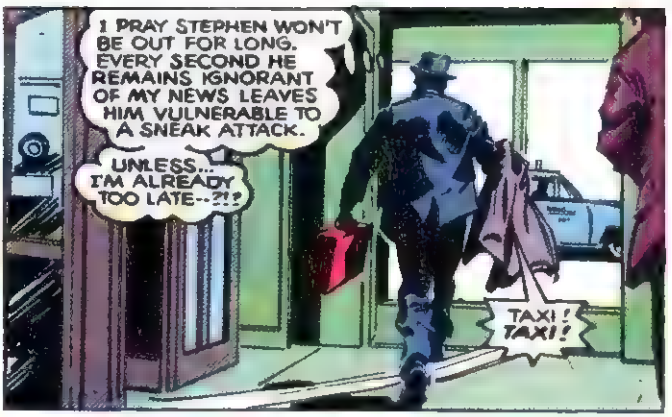
MIDNIGHT AT "HELL'S BELLS," A LITERARY BAR ON SIXTH AVENUE, JUST NORTH OF GREENWICH VILLAGE.
AS USUAL ON A FRIDAY NIGHT, THE PLACE IS JUMPING, THE TINY, IMPROVISED DANCE FLOOR JAMMED WITH PEOPLE BOOGEYING TO THE ELEMENTAL BEAT OF THIS WEEK'S GUEST BAND, AN IRISH DUO: "WEXFORD'S OWN, PIERCE AND LARRY!"
STEPHEN STRANGE FIRST CAME TO "BELLS" AS AN UNDERGRADUATE PRE-MED STUDENT; HE FOUND IT A GOOD PLACE TO UNWIND. HE'S PLEASED BEYOND WORDS -- AFTER HOURS SPENT WALKING AND TALKING WITH CLEA -- TO DISCOVER THAT IT STILL IS.
CLEA LIKES IT TOO, THOUGH SHE THINKS THE MUSIC IS A BIT TOO LOUD.
I BEG YOUR PARDON! I DIDN'T MEAN TO BUMP INTO --
-- YOU!!
WELL, WELL, WELL -- THIS IS A NIGHT FOR SURPRISES.
HI, DOC -- HOW'VE YOU BEEN?
I'VE ... BEEN.
ARE YOU WITH ANYONE? WOULD YOU CARE TO JOIN ME?
THE ANSWER IS, YES -- AND YES AGAIN. I'D LOVE TO.

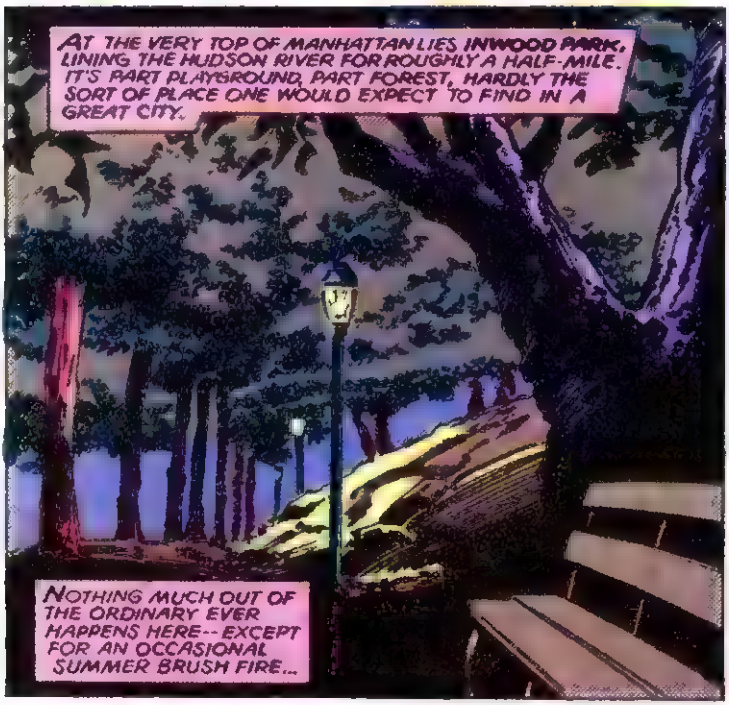
CLEA, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET SARA WOLFE. SHE'S OUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR-- AND AN OLD, DEAR FRIEND.
HOW... DO YOU DO?
HI.
DO YOU COME HERE OFTEN, SARA?
WHENEVER PIERCE AND LARRY ARE PLAYING.
I LIKE THEM, AND I LIKE THEIR MUSIC.
WHERE IS YOUR-- WHAT'S THE WORD-- DATE?
DOUG? AT THE BAR. HE'S BEEN THERE SINCE WE ARRIVED; I'M SURPRISED HE'S STILL ON HIS FEET.
STEPHEN, I'M WORRIED ABOUT HIM.
HE'S NOT A DRINKER. SOMETHING'S EATING AT HIM INSIDE, BUT HE WON'T TELL ME WHAT IT IS.
I KNOW THE FEELING.
AS SARA CONTINUES TALKING, NEITHER SHE NOR STRANGE SEES A TALL, HANDSOME, WELL-DRESSED MAN SLIP THROUGH THE CROWD LIKE A WRAITH...
...UNTIL HE REACHES DOUGLAS ROYCE.
MR. ROYCE?
YEAH? WHADDAYA WANT?
I'VE COME A VERY LONG WAY TO FIND YOU, MR. ROYCE. YOU KNOW WHY.
NO...
KRAK!
NO!!
WITH SURPRISING SPEED AND POWER FOR SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE FALLING DOWN DRUNK, ROYCE LASHES OUT, KNOCKING THE ELEGANT STRANGER TO THE FLOOR.

BEFORE ANYONE IS QUITE AWARE OF WHAT'S GOING ON -- MUCH LESS ABLE TO TRY TO STOP IT -- ROYCE IS OUT THE FRONT DOOR...
... AND RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE.
HE DOESN'T EVEN MAKE IT ACROSS 13TH STREET.
SHAME ON YOU, MR. ROYCE. WE THOUGHT YOU'D BE BRAVER THAN THIS.
HELL'S
YOU'VE LED US A MERRY CHASE THESE PAST MONTHS - FOR THAT WE'RE GRATEFUL. THE MORE DIFFICULT A HUNT IS -- THE MORE ELUSIVE OUR QUARRY -- THE BETTER WE LIKE IT.
BUT THE HUNT'S OVER.
DID THE MORTAL HURT YOU, MY BROTHER?
A LITTLE.
HE CAUGHT ME OFF-GUARD. I'D FORGOTTEN THAT I COULD BE HURT.
AND NOW, MR. ROYCE, IT'S YOUR TURN.
HELL'S
AAAARRRGH!
DEMONS OF DENAK -- THAT SCREAM!
DOUG -- ?! STEPHEN, HE'S GONE!
LET ME THROUGH, PLEASE; I'M A DOCTOR.
THAT POOR FELLER DON'T NEED NO DOCTOR, PAL. HE DON'T EVEN NEED AN UNDERTAKER.
Oh, MAN, IT WAS AWFUL...
BY THE VISHANTI!
WHAT -- WHAT HAPPENED HERE ?!?

INCREDIBLE -- THE MAN'S BODY HAS BEEN COMPLETELY CONSUMED; THERE'S NOTHING LEFT BUT ASHES.
AND... I'VE NEVER FELT SUCH A CONCENTRATION OF MALEVOLENT, ALIEN ENERGY.
THIS MAN WAS KILLED BY MAGICKAL MEANS -- BUT WHO DID IT? AND WHY?!
IT'S SOME TIME BEFORE STRANGE RETURNS HOME -- FIRST, THERE ARE THE USUAL FORMALITIES TO GO THROUGH WITH THE POLICE; AND THEN, MORE IMPORTANTLY, COMFORTING SARA WOLFE. SINCE LEAVING HER, THOUGH, THE MAGE HAS BEEN HARD AT WORK IN HIS LIBRARY.
IT WAS BEST TO LET EVERYONE BELIEVE THAT DOUGLAS ROYCE WAS SLAIN BY A FREAK BOLT OF LIGHTNING...
...BUT HE WAS MURDERED -- BY POWERS THE LIKE OF WHICH I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE. THERE ARE HINTS OF WHAT I'M AFTER IN SOME OF THESE BOOKS, BUT NOTHING CONCRETE. NOTHING THAT WILL HELP ME FIGHT THEM.
STEPHEN, I'VE BREWED SOME TEA.
SHOULDN'T YOU TAKE A BREAK? IT'S ALMOST DAWN.
NOT YET, MY LOVE. ROYCE'S KILLERS LEFT A UNIQUE PSYCHIC SIGNATURE BEHIND; I'VE BEEN USING THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO TO TRACK THEM DOWN.
THEY'RE HEADING FOR THEIR ... LAIR.
WHEN THEY REACH IT, THOUGH, WE'LL BE WAITING FOR THEM.
IF WE DON'T STOP THEM, ALL THAT LIVES WILL BE AT THEIR MERCY.
ENVELOPED IN A BLINDING CORONA OF ELDRITCH ENERGY, BOTH MAGE AND DISCIPLE DISAPPEAR...
RRING RRING
...AND SO, NEITHER OF THEM IS THERE TO HEAR...


TWENTY RINGS LATER, AT KENNEDY AIRPORT...
HE'S NOT HOME!
CLICK


I PRAY STEPHEN WON'T BE OUT FOR LONG. EVERY SECOND HE REMAINS IGNORANT OF MY NEWS LEAVES HIM VULNERABLE TO A SNEAK ATTACK.
UNLESS... I'M ALREADY TOO LATE--?!?
TAXI! TAXI!


AT THE VERY TOP OF MANHATTAN LIES INWOOD PARK, LINING THE HUDSON RIVER FOR ROUGHLY A HALF-MILE. IT'S PART PLAYGROUND, PART FOREST, HARDLY THE SORT OF PLACE ONE WOULD EXPECT TO FIND IN A GREAT CITY.
NOTHING MUCH OUT OF THE ORDINARY EVER HAPPENS HERE--EXCEPT FOR AN OCCASIONAL SUMMER BRUSH FIRE...

LATELY, THE PARK'S BEEN PRETTY PEACEFUL.
STEPHEN, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL PLACE! ARE WE STILL IN NEW YORK?
WE'RE STILL IN MANHATTAN.

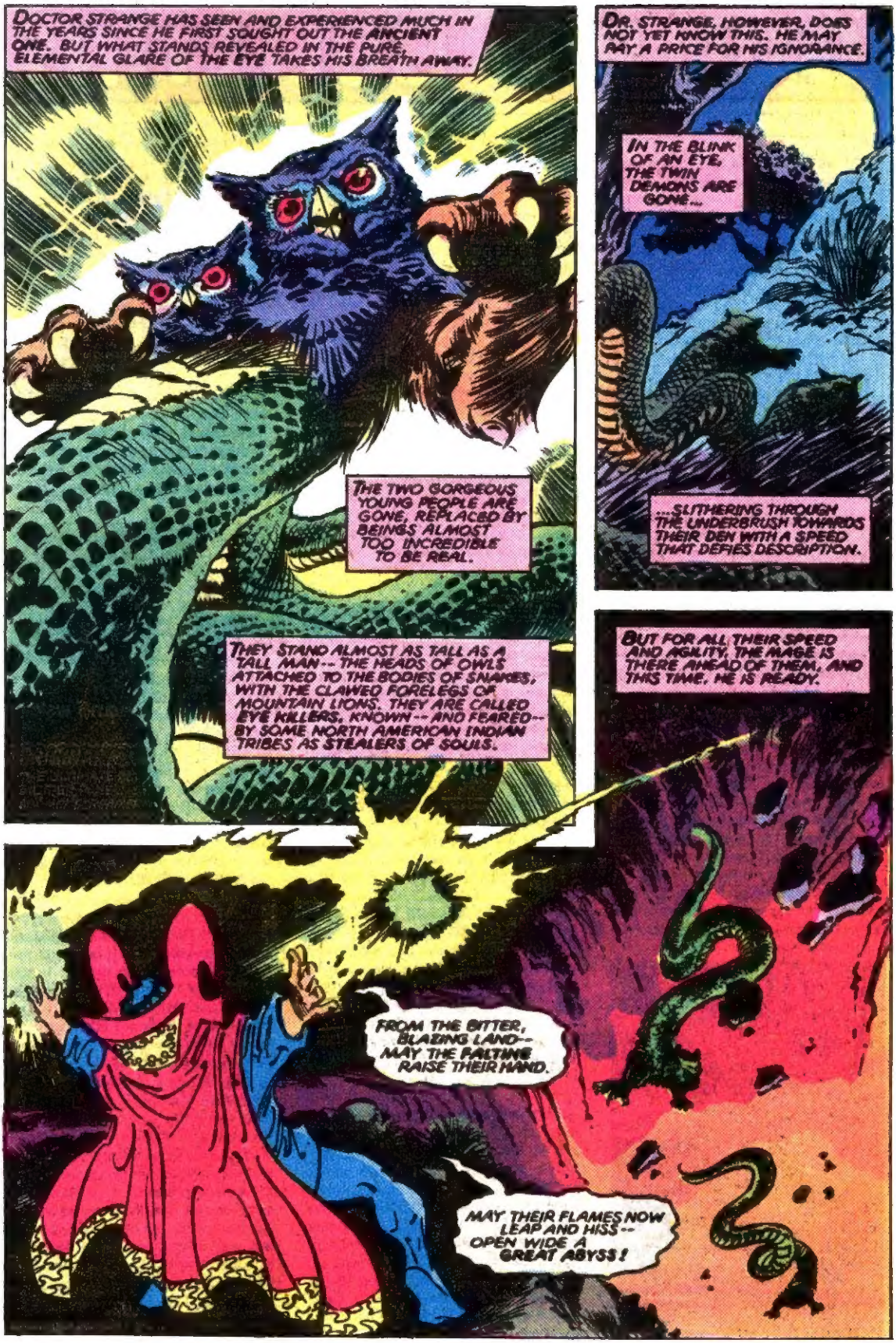
CLEA--LISTEN.
FOR WHAT? I DON'T HEAR ANYTHING.
THAT'S JUST IT. NO BIRDS, NO DOGS, NOT EVEN CRICKETS. NO NATURAL SOUNDS.
SOMEONE'S COMING!

WHATEVER THE SORCERER EXPECTED, THIS ISN'T QUITE IT.
HEY, BROTHER-MINE, LOOKS LIKE OUR FOREST ISN'T AS DESERTED AS WE THOUGHT.
EVENIN', FOLKS!
I MUST BE GETTING PARANOID--THEY'RE ONLY STUDENTS...

I SENSE NO PSYCHIC AURA ABOUT THEM, LIKE THE ONE I FELT OVER ROYCE'S ASHES.
HOGGOTH TAKE ME FOR A NOVICE! I SENSE NO AURA ABOUT THEM AT ALL! THEY'RE HIDING THEIR TRUE NATURE FROM ME, WITH THE SKILL OF TRUE ADEPTS!
NO TIME TO WASTE!
THE SHIELD OF THE SERAPHIM SHOULD PROTECT US FROM ANY ATTACK...
...BUT JUST TO BE SURE...
STEPHEN--?!?
AT A MENTAL COMMAND FROM STRANGE, THE MYSTIC SHIELD GOES OPAQUE, HIDING HIM FROM THE TWINS' VIEW AS HE SHOVES CLEA OFF THE RIDGE TRAIL AND DIVES DOWN THE STEEP SLOPE AFTER HER.
AN INSTANT LATER, THE SUPPOSEDLY-IMPREGNABLE SHIELD SHATTERS...
...UNDER THE IMPACT OF TWO MASSIVE BOLTS OF BLACK LIGHTNING.
BROTHER, THAT SHIELD-- DO WE FACE A MEDICINE MAN, A SHAMAN?!
A WHITE-EYES SHAMAN, SISTER--
--HE HAS NO POWER OVER US!
HE AND THE FEMALE HAVE GONE INTO THE WOODS--BURN THEM DOWN!

AGAIN, BLACK LIGHTNING FLARES FROM THEIR OUTSTRETCHED HANDS, THE BOLTS GOUGING TERRIBLE SCARS IN THE EARTH...
...TURNING BOULDERS TO POWDER AND SNAPPING POWERFUL TREES LIKE ROTTED TWIGS.
FOR THE MOMENT, THOUGH, STRANGE IS ONE STEP AHEAD OF THEM...
STEPHEN, COULD THESE BE SUPER-VILLAINS, LIKE THOSE WE'VE FOUGHT WITH THE DEFENDERS?
NO--BUT THEIR POWERS ARE BASED ON A FORM OF MAGIC THAT'S UNFAMILIAR TO ME. I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ANY DEFENSE AGAINST IT.
THERE, BROTHER! SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE MOON!
THE SHAMAN SEEKS TO ESCAPE US BY FLYING! HE DOES NOT YET KNOW THAT THE ONLY TRUE ESCAPE FROM US IS DEATH.
BE SILENT, SISTER, AND STRIKE! ALREADY THE EASTERN SKY LIGHTENS. OUR PREY MUST BE DESTROYED BEFORE SUNRISE!
BARELY PARRIED THAT LAST STRIKE!
IT TAKES ALL MY CONCENTRATION TO BLOCK THEIR BOLTS--I CAN SPARE NONE TO CONTROL MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION. WE'RE PINNED TO THE GROUND!
WORSE--MY COUNTER-ATTACKS DON'T SEEM TO AFFECT THEM.
THEY SHRUG OFF EVEN MY STRONGEST SPELLS.
...OR DEMONS WEARING HUMAN FORM?
IF ONLY I KNEW WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST--ARE THEY POWERFUL SORCERERS, HUMANS POSSESSED BY DEMONS...

UNTIL I KNOW THOSE ANSWERS, I CAN'T FIGHT EFFECTIVELY.
STEPHEN, I... I FEEL SO... WEAK.
Eh?
SO DO I! IT MUST BE THOSE TWINS -- SOMEHOW, THEY'RE DRAINING OUR VERY LIFE FORCE. BUT HOW?! HOW?!?
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?!
I... NEARLY PANICKED. I... MUST CALM MYSELF -- FORCE MYSELF TO THINK!
THEY'RE WEAKENING, SISTER!
TAKE THEIR SOULS -- NOW!
WHY WOULD THEY RUSH? WAIT -- THE MAN SPOKE OF FINISHING US BEFORE SUNRISE, AS IF THEY FEARED THE DAYLIGHT.
PERHAPS, THESE CREATURES -- LIKE VAMPIRES -- CANNOT ABIDE THE LIGHT OF DAY... AND OF TRUTH.
IF SO, THE LIGHT OF MY ENCHANTED EYE OF AGAMOTTO...
...SHOULD PROVE AS GREAT AN ANATHEMA TO THEM AS THE SUN ITSELF!
AIEE4ARRGH!!
BY THE VISHANTI, I WAS RIGHT!
WHILE I STILL HAVE THE ADVANTAGE, I MUST USE THE EYE TO STRIP AWAY ALL ILLUSIONS AND SHOW ME MY FOES AS THEY TRULY ARE -- THEN, I THINK, I'LL HAVE A CHANCE TO DEFEAT THEM.


DOCTOR STRANGE HAS SEEN AND EXPERIENCED MUCH IN THE YEARS SINCE HE FIRST SOUGHT OUT THE ANCIENT ONE. BUT WHAT STANDS REVEALED IN THE PURE, ELEMENTAL GLARE OF THE EYE TAKES HIS BREATH AWAY.
THE TWO GORGEOUS YOUNG PEOPLE ARE GONE, REPLACED BY BEINGS ALMOST TOO INCREDIBLE TO BE REAL.
THEY STAND ALMOST AS TALL AS A TALL MAN -- THE HEADS OF OWLS ATTACHED TO THE BODIES OF SNAKES, WITH THE CLAWED FORELEGS OF MOUNTAIN LIONS. THEY ARE CALLED EYE KILLERS. KNOWN -- AND FEARED -- BY SOME NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN TRIBES AS STEALERS OF SOULS.
DR. STRANGE, HOWEVER, DOES NOT YET KNOW THIS. HE MAY PAY A PRICE FOR HIS IGNORANCE.
IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, THE TWIN DEMONS ARE GONE...
...SLITHERING THROUGH THE UNDERBRUSH TOWARDS THEIR DEN WITH A SPEED THAT DEFIES DESCRIPTION.
BUT FOR ALL THEIR SPEED AND AGILITY, THE MAGE IS THERE AHEAD OF THEM, AND THIS TIME, HE IS READY.
FROM THE BITTER, BLAZING LAND -- MAY THE FALTINE RAISE THEIR HAND.
MAY THEIR FLAMES NOW LEAP AND HISS -- OPEN WIDE A GREAT ABYSS!

THE DEMONS SCREAM AS THEY FALL, TUMBLING END OVER END AS THE MOLTEN CORE OF THE EARTH RUSHES UP TOWARDS THEM.
WITH A GESTURE, STRANGE SEALS THE PIT BENEATH THEM. YET THE SCREAMS DO NOT END.
INSTEAD, IT SEEMS TO THE MAGE THAT THEY TURN TO LAUGHTER.
HE SHIVERS AS THE SUN APPEARS, AND WONDERS IF WHAT HE FEELS IS SIMPLY THE MORNING CHILL, OR... SOMETHING ELSE...
DID YOU DESTROY THEM?
I FEAR NOT. I MERELY... REMOVED THEM FOR A TIME. PERHAPS, BY THE TIME THEY RETURN...
...I'LL BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW TO FIGHT THEM.
LATER...
WONG, WE'RE HOME! WONG?!
WE'RE NOT ALONE! THERE'S A STRANGER IN THE PARLOR.
BE READY, DISCIPLE--
--WHILE I TURN ON THE LIGHTS!
SNAP
STEFANO!
ALFEO?
ALFEO SPINOSA--WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!
WELCOME, MY OLD FRIEND.
WHERE IS WONG?
AND IF NO ONE WAS HERE TO ADMIT THE HUMAN, HOW DID HE GET PAST STEPHEN'S MYSTIC DEFENSES?!
I'M AFRAID IT'S BUSINESS, AMICO MIO. AS YOU KNOW, I AM CURATOR OF THE VATICAN'S SAN GABRIEL ARCHIVES, THE GREATEST STOREHOUSE OF OCCULT LITERATURE IN THE WORLD.
YESTERDAY, THAT LIBRARY WAS ROBBED...
--BY THIS MAN.
BUT-- IT CAN'T BE...
...BARON MORDO!